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ABSTRACT

The varying definitions, the primary characteristics, and the causes of hate crimes are reviewed. In addition, misconceptions about what constitutes a hate crime are discussed, as are the increasing upward trends in various form of hate crime. The important role schools can play in alleviating the hate crime phenomenon is the focus of the concluding section. This article summarizes the Southwest Regional Laboratory's (SWRL's), "Hate Crime: A Sourcebook for Schools Confronting Bigotry, Harassment, Vandalism, and Violence." (KM)

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# HATE CRIME

ED 368 994

## The Rise of Hate Crime on School Campuses

Cristina Bodinger-deUriarte

Few Californians can forget the incident a few years ago when a young man turned an automatic rifle on a Stockton schoolyard full of Asian youngsters. Incidents of hate crime like this are extreme and infrequent, however, more subtle incidents occur every day. Graffiti is perhaps the most visual evidence. Obscene wall messages shout hate against ethnic, racial, and religious groups or beliefs. Others mock sexual preferences. Verbal abuse and threats are commonplace, and all too often groups form for the sole purpose of physically abusing individuals. Hate crimes are all these behaviors – words and deeds motivated by negative feelings and opinions about a victim's race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

The incidence of hate crime is currently occurring at record-breaking rates nationwide, strong evidence that bigotry still plays a prominent role in contemporary America.[1] The upsurge of violence and harassment spawned by bigotry has focused increased national, state, and local attention on the problem. Not since the Civil Rights Movement have government and other agencies been so concerned with hate crime. The situation is particularly troubling as hate crime has become a serious problem among the young and in the schools, which are experiencing difficulties in their attempts to recognize and eliminate the problem. The New York City Police Department reports that "70% of all bias incidents are now committed by people under 19," a statistic indicating a nationwide trend, according to the Center for Democratic Renewal.[2] Furthermore, this trend has caught the attention of organized hate groups. Recent articles in the *Washington Post* and the *Austin-American Statesman*, for example, report that the Ku Klux Klan now considers high school and college campuses to be among its most fertile recruiting grounds.

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The scope of the incidents, the common element of bigotry, and the number of groups targeted for violence and harassment make hate crime a problem of crisis proportion and one that schools can't ignore. Yet information is sparse, official definitions vary, and available guidelines and established programs are not widely known. To aid school district personnel and collaborative agencies in identifying and resolving hate crime, the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) has developed a hate crime sourcebook. The guide, *Hate Crime: A Sourcebook for Schools Confronting Bigotry, Harassment, Vandalism, and Violence*, presents an overview of hate crime, as well as tools, programs, and resources for use in curtailing and coping with hate crime. The following text provides a brief summary of several major sections in the sourcebook.

### What is Hate Crime?

When the well-being of school children is threatened, it is ideal for policymakers, curriculum designers, program leaders, school administrators, and teachers to have a similar understanding of the nature of the threat and its remedy. However, in coping with hate crime, educational policymakers have a difficult time gauging the extent of such crime on any given campus and establishing appropriate response procedures and prevention programs to deal with the problem.

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One reason for this is that official definitions of hate crime vary. The debate is further complicated because some hate crime behaviors, even those that are very offensive, do not violate any state or federal laws. Until there is a clear definition, including the full range of behaviors, policymakers and educators are stymied in their efforts to curtail or prevent hate crime.

SWRL defines hate crime as

> . . . any act, or attempted act, to cause physical injury, emotional suffering, or property damage through intimidation, harassment, racial or ethnic slurs and bigoted epithets, vandalism, force, or the threat of force, motivated all or in part by hostility to the victim's real or perceived race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

SWRL's definition of hate crime builds on the definition included in the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990. It also draws together common elements of competing definitions and identifies the full range of hate crime behavior potentially contributing to tension and violence.

## Characteristics of Hate Crimes

Hate Crimes may seem different from other assaults against persons and property only in terms of their motivation. In some instances this appears to be true. However, some characteristics typical of hate-motivated violence are relatively rare in other crimes of violence. Such characteristics generally fall into the following categories and appear singly or in combination in most hate-motivated crimes.

- *The relationship of the victim to the perpetrator.* Most assaults involve two people who know each other well. The opposite is true of hate-motivated assaults, which are "very likely to be 'stranger' crimes," where the perpetrator and victim are completely unknown to each other. [3]
- *The number of perpetrators.* The majority of assaults typically involve one victim and one perpetrator or two "mutual combatants."[4] Based on his study of 450 hate crime incidents, criminologist John McDevitt argues that rather than the common one-on-one assault, hate crime generally involves "an average of four assailants for each victim," although the ratio varies.[5]
- *The uneven nature of the conflict.* In addition to the frequently unfair dynamic of ganging-up on the victim, hate crime perpetrators often attack younger or weaker victims, or arm themselves and attack unarmed victims.
- *The amount of physical damage inflicted.* Hate crime is extremely violent. In fact, victims of hate crime "are three times more likely to require hospitalization than 'normal' assault victims."[6]
- *The treatment of property.* "In a very large fraction of property crimes something of value is taken. In hate-motivated crimes, it is apparently more likely that something of value is damaged or destroyed."[7] This is related to the next category of hate crime as well.
- *The apparent absence of gain.* Gain is absent in most hate crime. For example, although property may be damaged, it usually is not stolen. In hate crime, no personal score is settled; no profit is made.
- *The places in which hate crimes occur.* Hate crime frequently takes place at churches, synagogues, mosques, cemeteries, monuments, schools, camps, and in or around the victim's home.

The following incident is marked by several characteristics of hate crime. The victims and assailants are unknown to one another. Although they do not outnumber the victims, there are multiple assailants. The perpetrators are armed while the victims are not, and the attack is extremely violent. Finally, property is destroyed rather than stolen, and the perpetrators have nothing to gain.

> [Denver, CO, October 1990] Six Japanese college students, celebrating a birthday by singing and strumming a guitar in a public park, were attacked by four young men who came at them suddenly out of the dark. The $400 guitar was taken and smashed. The students may not have understood the insults the four began screaming at them. But they understood very well the baseball bats and sticks. The young men lifted the weapons high, "like golf swings, like home run swings," one suspect later told the police. The blows cut open the students' heads and bruised their ribs.[8]

## Hate Crime on the Rise

Leonard Zeskind, research director for the Center for Democratic Renewal, claims that hate crime has attained a frequency which makes bigoted incidents commonplace.

> Wherever such statistics are kept across the United States, bigotry cases have become more commonplace. . . . The incidents have ranged from anonymous spray-painting of slurs to cross burnings to murder. What they have in common is their motivation: fury directed at those who are different because of their race, their religion, or their sexual orientation.[9]

Other sources stress not only the commonplace occurrence of hate crime, but also a continuing increase. The media, minority-service agencies, watchdog organizations, and government agencies all warn of an unprecedented and sustained rise in hate crime. In response, federal and state legislators have passed laws requiring various hate crime reporting, tracking, or investigation activities. In addition, members of Congress pressured the U.S. Department of Justice to create a hotline (800/347-HATE) through which citizens can report hate crime.

Formal data on hate crime rates are limited. However, data that are available thoroughly validate the consensus that

hate crime is increasing, both in concerted, organized activity and in spontaneous, unorganized action. Whether reporting by number of hate crime incidents in a given region or by number of offenses against a given victim group, all agencies report a rise in hate crime rates. Increases from 11% to 36% have been reported by various constituencies.

The following items illustrate the growing urgency around hate crime as an increasingly frequent occurrence. More detailed information is available from the agencies cited. Their addresses appear on page 6.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) reported that the January 1991 hate crime tally exceeded that of all of 1990 and that the current rate is the highest since the ADC began compiling hate crime statistics in 1985.[10]

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force reported more than 7,000 antihomosexual crimes in 1990. In Los Angeles County the Commission on Racial, Ethnic, Religious, and Minority Violence reported 125 hate crimes against homosexuals in 1990. In San Francisco the gay and lesbian Community United Against Violence reported that 556 gay men and lesbians suffered hate crimes in 1990, an increase of more than 20% over 1989.

***. . . hate crime took place at one-third of the L.A. County schools in 1989. The highest rates occurred at junior high and middle schools.***

In Maryland assaults, arsons, cross burnings, and threats prompted by race or religion more than doubled between 1986 and 1989.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment found that hate crime motivated by a reaction against race, religion, or sexual orientation rose 20% last year. Of these, 149 were assaults, 2 were cross burnings, and 1 was murder.

Anti-Semitic incidents climbed to a record 1,685 in 1990 – making it the fourth consecutive record-breaking year. A survey by the Anti-Defamation League showed anti-Jewish vandalism, such as arson, bombing, cemetery desecration, and swastika graffiti, up 72% and personal assault up 11% over 1989. College campus hate activity was up 36% over the same period.

The Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations/County Office of Education survey reported that hate crime took place at one-third of the L.A. County schools in 1989. The highest rates occurred at junior high and middle schools.

In the first half of 1990, the 272 entries in the log of hate crime for Orange County, California, represented a 32% jump in reported incidents over the same period in 1989.

## Misunderstanding Hate Crime

Despite widespread concern abut hate crime, reliable information on the problem is sparse. The dearth of widely disseminated and broadly inclusive information naturally leads to dependence on rumor, stereotype, and simplistic messages reinforced by skewed media presentations. Cultural and historical ignorance and fear inevitably distort the understanding of hate crime.

Even if unintentional, patterns of media coverage tend to heighten dangerous, bigoted tensions. Sensationalized presentations of perceived minority group threats to safety, health, and economy are seldom balanced by positive stories concerning minorities. In fact, for more than 20 years, journalism studies[11] have consistently shown that news coverage of African-Americans and Latinos is extremely limited, while stories of drug busts, gang activity, and other violence are frequent. There is also "a failure to cover events that would be covered in white neighborhoods, a failure to feature interesting black people just because they are interesting, as is done with whites."[12]

The Asian and Pacific Islander Advisory Committee has found similarly unbalanced treatment of Asians. Asian/Pacific Islander Americans tend to be largely absent in those media, and when they are included, the characterizations are negative. Rather than being included as neighbors, colleagues, and people who enrich the social and cultural fabric, Asian/Pacific Islander Americans find themselves cast as economic competitors, historical enemies, and as racial caricatures.[13]

Linda Williams of the Joint Center for Political Studies in Washington, D.C., found a similar unbalanced media presentation in the coverage of all minorities. Her research of the press concluded that "minorities are either ignored or are portrayed as 'them, who have [problems] or cause problems for us.' . . . minority coverage [is] nonexistent or negative, without positive, counterbalancing words."[14] A panel of journalists, politicians, and researchers at a Harvard University conference agreed that "there are major and damaging differences in the ways the press covers whites and minorities." Panel member Michael Oreskes, national political correspondent for the *New York Times*, referred to this as "a very frightening gap."[15] Such perception gaps are frightening because they perpetuate an us-versus-them view of majority and minority races, ethnicities, religions, and sexual preferences.

This us-versus-them viewpoint perpetuates misconceptions about hate crime. When hate crime erupts, the perception of the person on the street is that the perpetrators are either "fighting back at last" or are justified by the overall climate of fear, intimidation, and random violence. The following incident provides an illustration.

> In New York City in 1983, Bernhard Goetz, afraid of the African-American teenagers who had approached him for money on the subway, responded by firing the loaded gun he carried with him. At least one of the teenagers was shot in the back while running away. Barbara Walters expressed sympathy and support for Goetz in her televised special concerning the event, a sentiment echoed by the person-on-the-street remarks also broadcast.

The general public tends to dismiss cases of extreme violence perpetrated on nonwhites by whites as exceptional and probably committed by isolated, maladjusted individuals. The data do not bear this out. Of the hate crime incidents catalogued for 47 states (excluding Alaska, Indiana, and South Dakota) over a period of six years, only a handful involved whites targeted by nonwhites.[16] The truth is that heterosexual, non-Jewish whites not involved in interracial relationships are the lowest risk group for hate crime. Those groups most likely to be victimized by hate crimes are (in alphabetical order): African-Americans, Arabs, Asians, gay males, Jews, Latinos, lesbians, Native Americans, and white women in interracial relationships.

***The principal cause of bigoted violence . . . is underlying social tensions***

> When minority members are the aggressors in hate crime, they tend to victimize members of other minority groups. According to San Francisco Attorney Diane Chen, who set up a hate-crime project for the Lawyers Committee on Urban Affairs, the worsening economy has resulted in an increase in interethnic conflict, as well as in whites attacking nonwhites. "Whenever economic problems get worse, hate crimes go up. There's a lot more personal tension and aggression, and when there are fewer resources and people are struggling, some look for an enemy to target. Communities of color tend to be in the lower economic strata, and they start to go after each other."[17]

It is tempting to attribute the growing hate crime rate primarily to increased activity by organized hate groups. After all, as of 1986, 170,000 Americans were known members or active contributors to hate groups belonging to the White Supremacist Movement. However, the Center for Democratic Renewal, which has monitored hate crimes nationwide for the last decade, warns against dismissing hate crime as the sole province of such groups.

> There are areas of the country, which have experienced high levels of bigoted violence without correspondingly high levels of organized white supremacists. . . . The principal cause of bigoted violence then, is not organized white supremacist activity. Rather, underlying social tensions — racial conflicts and scapegoating — appear to give rise to bigoted violence.[18]

Bigotry is widespread and results in organized and spontaneous displays of hostility. Further, such displays frequently include extreme violence.

Misconceptions about hate crime perpetrators are coupled with misconceptions about the seriousness of hate crime behavior. In fact, over the six-year period in which the Center for Democratic Renewal compiled descriptions of hate crime, it found that people tend to believe that most incidents culminate in little more than harmless name-calling, threatening notes and phone calls, and minor acts of vandalism. "In the overwhelming majority of instances, bigoted violence is simply ignored, dismissed as the work of young 'pranksters,' or simply left unexplained."[19] The belief that these acts are harmless is mistaken. So is our failure to realize that more violent manifestations of bigotry also are alarmingly frequent. In case after case, bigoted incidents beginning in "minor" ways ended in tragedy. The following incident is typical.

> In 1983, Thong Hy Huynh, a Vietnamese-American student was attacked and stabbed to death, following months of racial taunts and harassment that school authorities allegedly knew of and in which they failed to intervene. Several months after the murder, a memorial planter was spray-painted with swastikas and the epithet, "Death to Gooks."[20]

## Causes of Hate Crime

Bigotry has many psychosocial causes. Some are more psychological than social, developing out of individual trauma or personal pathology. A World War II veteran, for example, may have survived a scarring experience and come to associate it with all Japanese. This would be trauma-induced bigotry. Personal pathology also may induce bigotry. For example, an unbearable sense of personal failure may lead to the need to avoid self-blame by scapegoating others; the need to feel superior by dehumanizing others; or the need to feel powerful by subjugating others. Where minorities are targeted for the role of "others," bigotry is the result.

Other causes of bigotry are more social than psychological, and can be addressed through social means such as school-level education, programs, and policy. Hate crime is a form of depersonalized vengeance in which strangers, by virtue of their membership in racial, ethnic, religious, or minority target groups, are scapegoated as the symbolic sources of broad social, economic, or political unease.

*Social unease.* Americans often are poorly informed and suspicious of cultures and lifestyles outside their own. Yet as the demographic pattern of urban minority neighborhoods, ethnic enclaves, and white suburbs increasingly shifts to a pattern of multiethnic neighborhoods and diversified cities, daily exposure to those different from oneself becomes inevitable. Unfortunately, forced exposure does not guarantee increased understanding.

***Americans often are poorly informed and suspicious of cultures and lifestyles outside their own.***

This may account for the fact that a school is at increased risk for hate crime when any one minority ethnic group (either white or nonwhite) begins to exceed 10% of the student enrollment.[21]

When forced exposure occurs, many people rely on stereotypes to negotiate an unfamiliar social environment. Rather than face the unknown and interact with "suspect" individuals, people often make "estimates of central tendencies associated with particular social categories."[22]

*Economic unease.* Distanced from the experiences leading to the Civil Rights Movement and affirmative action legislation of the 1960s and 1970s, young men and women find themselves competing with others whom they perceive to have an unfair edge in obtaining jobs and scholarships. Amid resented minority competition, immigrants are perceived to be arriving in overwhelming numbers, also competing for jobs and burdening an already stressed social services system. Sociologist Aldon D. Morris explains that "the most violent forms of racism tend to occur in lower-income neighborhoods where blacks and whites are competing for the same jobs and opportunities."[23] The situation is further complicated by the world market and global economy, the dynamics of which are poorly understood by the average American. What tends to prevail in the face of incidents like auto-plant closings is the feeling that the American economy is being undermined by unfair or suspect foreign market practices. Such an inaccurate view can lead to the scapegoating of recent immigrants.

*Political unease.* Few political issues can be streamlined into "good versus evil." Yet this is the model of choice in print and broadcast media, as well as in political speeches, when referring to opponents. It is only a small step from casting ideological opponents as members of "the red menace" or "the evil empire" to the derisive caricature of all with politically, religiously, philosophically, or culturally distinct outlooks. Such a process of dehumanizing outsiders makes any member of the "wrong" racial, ethnic, religious, or social group seem an appropriate target for righteous anger, punitive vandalism, and violence.

## The Crucial Role of Schools

Schools are crucial to the resolution of hate crime because the young are the perpetrators and the schools are the staging grounds. Furthermore, bigotry is learned at an early age and, therefore, should be circumvented or countered at an early age. Bigotry also is often learned and socially reinforced through home, community, media, economic, or political environments and can be unlearned or addressed through an educational environment.

The increase of hate crime in the general population and among the young in particular is reflected on school campuses, from preschool through higher education. According to the Center for Democratic Renewal, "The incidence of hate violence in high schools and on college campuses has dramatically increased."[24] United States Department of Justice figures show that between 1986 and 1987, racial incidents classified as school-related rose by almost 50%. The Asian and Pacific Islander Advisory Committee argues:

> Within many of our schools, racial and ethnic prejudice are an integral part of the social fabric. Instead of being places that provide safe and supportive environments . . . schools have become the sites where children are exposed to racial hostility and intolerance. They must learn to cope with incidents that include name calling, being pushed or spat on, deliberately tricked, teased or laughed at, or being subjected to unprovoked physical harassment and victimization, all of which contribute to feelings of rejection, isolation, and fear.[25]

Schools need to adopt policies, develop curriculum, and implement programs designed to prevent and curtail hate crime. The efforts of high schools and even elementary schools are critical to this effort as younger and younger students are involved in hate crime.

The SWRL book from which this paper is taken, *Hate Crime: A Sourcebook for Schools Confronting Bigotry, Harassment, Vandalism, and Violence*, not only elaborates on the ideas presented here in capsule form, it gives school-site and district-level personnel usable tools such as

- a 10-point curriculum planning guide
- a 14-point checklist to help determine whether a given incident constitutes a hate crime
- a school survey form to help assess the types of hate crime, victim groups, etc., at the school.

The book also provides other details of procedure and implementation, along with listings of programs and resources. Copies may be purchased for $18.95 from Research for Better Schools, 444 North Third Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19123, (215) 574-9300.

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**Resource Organizations**

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
4201 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20008 (202) 244-2990

American Jewish Committee
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022 (213) 751-4000

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
6505 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 814
Los Angeles, California 90048 (213) 655-8205

California Tomorrow
Fort Mason Center, Building B
1105 San Francisco
San Francisco, California 94123 (415) 441-7631

Center for Democratic Renewal
P.O. Box 50469
Atlanta, Georgia 30302 (404) 221-0025

Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence
Tompkins Square Station
P.O. Box 20756
New York, New York 10009 (718) 857-7419

County of Los Angeles
Commission on Human Relations
320 W. Temple Street, Suite 1184
Los Angeles, California 90012 (213) 974-7611

Interagency Gang Task Force
500 W. Temple Street #343
Los Angeles, California 90012 (213) 378-5945

Intercultural Communication Institute
8835 S.W. Canyon Lane, Suite 238
Portland, Oregon 97225 (503) 297-4622

Klanwatch Project
Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama 36104 (205) 264-0286

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